



Wharton
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA
Aresty Institute of Executive Education

**EXECUTIVE
EDUCATION**

Delivering Superb Education in the Midst of a Global Crisis

NANYANG BUSINESS SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP



The Challenge

Over 40 Nanyang Business School MBA and EMBA participants were to arrive in Philadelphia in late March 2020 to attend the annual one-week *Nanyang Business School: Excellence in Finance Program* at Wharton Executive Education. They were already in California when the global pandemic and travel restrictions thwarted their plans, and were required to fly back to Singapore almost immediately. Without the Nanyang students physically present in Philadelphia, how would Wharton deliver on its commitment to the decade-long partnership between the two distinguished schools?

The Goal

The coronavirus pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for the time-honored Wharton Executive Education-Nanyang Business School partnership. Welcoming the students to campus, as the school had done every year, was suddenly no longer an option for the foreseeable future. Wharton faculty and staff wanted to fully serve the educational needs of the Nanyang students but needed to protect the health and safety of everyone involved.

Despite the challenges, Wharton aimed to deliver the same kind of world-class educational experience for which it has long been renowned: top-tier, personalized, and intellectually stimulating, as well as real-world and relevant. In short, an experience commensurate with Wharton's reputation and what its trusted partners had come to expect.

Another aspect of the goal was to design and launch the educational event as quickly as feasible, accommodating Nanyang's existing academic schedule without sacrificing quality.

The Solution

After extensive discussions with Nanyang Business School administrators, Wharton created a program that would deliver the same course content but on a virtual platform. It would be synchronous, taught in real time. The course was fashioned swiftly—in only a week—yet provided equivalent educational value and relevance for the Singapore student group.

Making the Virtual Feel Personal

LIVE INTERACTION

Strong participant engagement is fostered by individual exercises, group work, and peer-to-peer dialogue. Participants are encouraged to ask questions and offer their own observations throughout the program.

WEBCAMS & CHAT FEATURES

Participants are asked to activate webcams to help enhance visual and personal aspects of the classroom community. A chat box feature enables frequent communication across the cohort and faculty. Hands-on assistance is provided by the Wharton team who is always present and available throughout the program.

BREAKOUT ROOMS

A powerful feature of the virtual program is the virtual “breakout rooms.” Faculty can quickly organize participants into small groups to work on projects and “visit” each virtual room as needed, to offer guidance and encouragement. The breakout rooms are disassembled at the touch of a button to seamlessly bring the entire group back together.

SCREEN SHARING

Participants can also seamlessly share their finished work, or work in progress, with the professor and with each other in real time. This facilitates dialogue and enhances the learning, reinforcing the immediate impact of the knowledge.

The program was led by the same stellar Wharton faculty who had been scheduled for the in-person program. Wharton adjunct finance professor David Wessels is the author of *Valuation*, widely regarded as the gold standard textbook for corporate valuation and performance management. Michael Roberts, the William H. Lawrence Professor of Finance, is an award-winning researcher. And management professor Emilie Feldman has received numerous scholarly awards as well as publication in both academic journals and major media outlets.

“*Even though it was virtual, we maintained a high level of learning engagement. We were able to maintain the rigor of our in-class programs: to still challenge participant assumptions, give them a new perspective, and help them critically think about business and how some of these frameworks and strategies could be applied immediately.*”

— Antoinette Simon, Senior Director, Global Partnerships,
Wharton Executive Education

The team worked tirelessly, in close communication with Wharton staff, to adapt their content and teaching approaches for the *Excellence in Finance Program* to the new platform. Moreover, Wharton professors accommodated the 12-hour time difference between southeast Asia and Philadelphia, starting their teaching day as early as 4 a.m. so they could be virtually present with the Nanyang students in what was the evening in the time zones where they were located.

The Nanyang Business School experience was not Wharton Executive Education's first foray into virtual learning. Wharton has successfully pivoted to meet its clients' needs for innovative solutions—including electronic content—on other occasions. These include delivering synchronous programs for EO, a global organization for entrepreneurs, and for OneConnect, a technology platform for financial institutions in China. For OneConnect, Wharton Executive Education offered learning modules across China where Wharton faculty taught in-person sessions in Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Beijing, which were simultaneously broadcast out to additional groups. Approximately 150 to 200 students participated in that program.



“*Engagement and participation were incredibly high. The technology allowed me to seamlessly lead case discussions and breakout sessions, just as I would in person. I could sense the aha moments happening through the screen as students learned and synthesized ideas from the week, which made this a really rewarding experience.*”

— Emilie Feldman, Associate Professor of Management,
The Wharton School

WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN MORE?

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Testimonials

“On behalf of NBS, I would like to express our appreciation for the online program you put together in such a short span of time and accommodating our requests. From what I gathered, our students were very impressed with the quality of the online delivery and it certainly exceeded their expectations of remote learning.”

— Shirley Yong, Deputy Director, Nanyang Business School

The following quotes come directly from participants' evaluation forms:

“Absolutely brilliant to be able to convey important strategic concepts and finance insights in a simple and easy to understand way and to leverage the online format and tools extremely effectively.”

“Great teaching from the professor and awesome coordination from the whole team. Never thought the breakout sessions would be so effectively managed. To an extent this was better than in-class breakouts.”

“Great engagement with the professor and the breakout session. Much better than expected.”

“Much better than expected for an online teaching. No mean feat considering the super early hour for the professor and super late hours for us.”



“At the end of the day, the students' comments were incredibly positive. I think people felt the knowledge was relevant [and] timely, in the sense that they were getting real feedback to very challenging problems. And I think they believed that they were different at the end of the session than when they started... If that's the way the class walks out the door every time, you know you've been successful.”

— David Wessels, Adjunct Professor of Finance,
The Wharton School

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